

Saint Mary

ON THE HILL
CATHOLIC CHURCH



News and Notes from Fr. Jerry

Answering the Important Questions

Dear Parishioners,

With First Communion and graduations, with Mother's Day and devotions to our Blessed Mother, May is a month of some wonderful celebrations. In the midst of those celebrations, I want to rejoice in the completion of the accreditation process for our parish school. I am so very grateful for the leadership of Miss Ellen Hoffman and Mr. Joe McBride, who helped the entire school community prepare well for last month's visit of the Accreditation Team. I know the team was impressed not only by our beautiful school facilities but also with the quality of the education that is taking place within those facilities. I offer my congratulations to the entire school community.

Recently, I talked to a parent who, a couple of years ago, because of financial difficulties, made a decision to withdraw his children from our parish school. With the help of our CCD program, he gladly became more involved in the religious education of his children. But even with his added involvement, which was a good thing, he still found that one hour a week of formal religious education simply could not compare to the Catholic atmosphere that his children sorely missed when they had to leave our parish school. I reviewed our approach to stewardship with him, and I am so happy that the family is willing to make the sacrifice of giving of their time, talent, and treasure so that the children will be able to return to St. Mary on the Hill School in the fall.

When it comes to Catholic education in America, the numbers are downright startling. In 1965, approximately half of all Catholic families sent their kids to parochial schools; today, roughly 15 percent do so. While there are numerous reasons for this, the big one seems to be that the cost of parochial school has vastly increased. This is due primarily to a lack of religious vocations to staff our schools, which translates into more lay educators and a costlier education. I feel blessed that, because so many in our faith community live stewardship as a way of life, we are able to have such a vibrant parish school. But when it comes to Catholic formation, I think an even more troubling concern has been a reduction in religious definition. For many people, Catholicism has become less of an all-consuming lifestyle and more of a part-time identity. Where Catholic education was once the primary responsibility for Catholic parents, it is increasingly becoming a secondary option among many other extracurricular activities.

But every child has a soul. And what do we expect of parents in regard to their children's religious formation? What are we to make of a father who can spend 30 minutes driving home from the ball field dissecting the flaws in his 14-year-old son's pitching performance, but never speaks to that boy about religious questions? I would prefer to say "ultimate questions" – as the basic questions of human existence have to be

Mass Schedule

Sunday, 7:45 a.m., 10:30 a.m.,
12:15 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Monday, 7:00 a.m. and 9:15 a.m.

Tuesday, 7:00 a.m. and 9:15 a.m.

Wednesday, 7:00 a.m. and 5:15 p.m.

Thursday, 7:00 a.m. and 9:15 a.m.

Friday, 7:00 a.m. and 9:15 a.m.

Saturday, 9:15 a.m.,
5:00 p.m. (Sunday Vigil)

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Saturday, 3:45-4:45 p.m.

Perpetual Adoration Chapel

Chapel is located at the corner of
Monte Sano and Bellevue.

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Mothers and Stewardship



We celebrate the month of Mary during May and during this month we also celebrate Mother's Day. It seems fitting that we honor our mothers during May since Mary is given to us by God as the example of true Christian motherhood.

Those who are called to be mothers have been blessed by God and called to fulfill a very important responsibility. Mothers are the vehicle through which God brings new life into this world. When we talk about Christian Stewardship we talk about sacrificially returning to God what we have been given. What can more clearly be a demonstration of complete sacrifice than the relationship between mother and child during the nine months of growth in the womb? During these nine months, the child's life depends on the actions of the mother as the first portion of her energy and nourishment goes directly to the growing baby.

Although this relationship may change to some extent after the child is born – a mother's sacrifice for her child is far from over after the birth. The role of the mother is critical in the child's development – both spiritually and physically – throughout life. Mothers provide the comfort, nurture and support necessary for their children to become productive citizens and responsible Christians.

The job of a mother is not an easy one. This is a fact that Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew very well. She worried when her son appeared to be lost at the age of 12, only to find Him later in His Father's House. She was probably concerned as Jesus began His public ministry – not knowing what difficulties and rejections He would encounter along the way. And Mary must have experienced great anguish as she watched her Son's body being crucified to a cross.

May all mothers look to Mary as their model for motherhood and ask her intercession as they strive to fulfill their God-given role in their children's lives. During the month of May, let us all take some time to express our appreciation to our mothers for allowing us to come into this world, for loving us, and for serving as an example of what it means to be a steward for life.

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Living the Universal Catholic Faith

Abiodun Akinwuntan

St. Mary's parishioner Abiodun Akinwuntan is certainly well traveled. A native of Nigeria, Abiodun has lived and studied in four countries, and he speaks five languages fluently. He and his wife, Titilayo, have three children – each born in a different nation.

"It's a strange world," Abiodun says, with a laugh. "My first daughter, Jade, she is Belgian. My second daughter, Temidire, is Irish, and my son, Oluwaseun, is American."

But after spending much of his adulthood traveling the world to complete his doctoral studies in Neurological Rehabilitation, Abiodun and his family found a home in Augusta seven years ago, when he accepted a position at Georgia Health Sciences University. In fact, the Catholic education that St. Mary's School offered his family played a big part in Abiodun's decision to move to the CSRA.

"One of the reasons I came to Augusta was that I wanted a not very big city that had very good Catholic education, so it kind of figured into my consideration of a place to work," he recalls. "When I interviewed over here, one of the things they knew to attract me to come over here was to tell me that the Catholic education system here in Augusta was one of the best. So during the visit, I visited the church and the school, liked what I saw and thought, 'this is the perfect fit for my children.'"

Since that time, Abiodun and his family have selflessly served our parish community by sharing of their time, talent and treasure in thanksgiving for the many blessings they have received from God and their fellow parishioners. Abiodun has a strong devotion to our parish liturgical celebrations, participating as an usher, a lector, and a gift-bearer. Jade, now a freshman at Aquinas High School, shares in her father's love of liturgical ministry as a parish altar server. And together, as a family, they have participated in the Elijah Cup devotion, praying for vocations.

"For me, it is a big message to my children that as Christians, we do not only have the obligation to come to church and worship – we need to come to church and participate in helping things to move well," Abiodun says. "It is good for my children to see that their mother and I are so invested in the Church, and that it is not a burden; it is a way of life. My father did the same thing, and we knew it was important to him. And I promised I would give my family the same upbringing."

Abiodun has been active in Catholic communities on three different continents. But, while he has witnessed firsthand the different ways that different cultures express their Catholic Faith, he loves the consistency that the Catholic Church provides in its liturgy, traditions, and core values.



The Akinwuntan family



From left: Fr. Jerry Ragan, Bishop Gregory Hartmayer, and Jade Akinwuntan on the occasion of her Confirmation

"It is a pleasure to be in the Church, and the one thing I like with the Catholic Church is its consistency, especially with the order of Mass, across different countries, cultures and continents," he says. "Integration or adjustment to whichever church you find yourself in is no adjustment at all; you can easily follow the Mass. And having children grow up in an environment where they incorporate God into their learning process, to me, is the biggest and most important legacy that we are giving to our children."

Our Lady of Fatima: *With the Faith of Young Children, the World was Changed*

It is interesting to note how often God uses children to spread the Faith. To most of us, young children seem so fragile and simple-minded. We wouldn't dream of entrusting our young children with huge responsibilities. After all, they are our responsibilities – we are entrusted to care for them and bring them up in the Faith.

Yet, time and again, God calls upon the faith of a young child, and He uses that child to carry out His will. Ponder for a moment the Blessed Mother, whose memory we hold especially dear during this month of May. She was but a young woman to whom, once she uttered that simple “yes,” God made the mother of His only Son. What weighty responsibility that was – and yet, God knew that there was no better Christian to bear that responsibility than she.

This month, in particular, we celebrate the feast of Mary's appearances at Fatima, and we honor the three young children to whom she entrusted them with the message that “God... is about to punish the world for its crimes by means of a war.” She showed them a vision of hell – “a great sea of fire which seemed to be under the earth.” Then she told them, “You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world a devotion to my Immaculate Heart.”

From then on, the young children – Lucia, age 10; Jacinta, age 7; and Francisco, age 9 – were to pray and make sacrifices for sinners while they spread the devotion to her Immaculate Heart. Can you imagine seeing hell? Surely that would be a most terrifying vision for any of us. And then, to be told that you must pray and make sacrifices – spreading devotion throughout the



world or many sinners won't be saved?

Well, these young children heeded her warning and took the task on themselves. But not without some trouble.

The children were soon kidnapped by the atheistic mayor and put in jail. Yet, they were not slightly deterred. They had taken on the task that Mary laid before them, and, no matter how young they were at the time or how much Satan would try to get in their way – they were committed to carrying out God's will.

While in jail, the children converted the other prisoners – a mark of their commitment to the mission.

Then, on Oct. 13, 1917, the day on which the Blessed Mother had promised the children that she would reveal her name to them, Lucia told the public that Mary would perform a great miracle – testifying to the

truth of her apparitions.

At noon, the sun appeared as a disk that gave off various colors. The people looked straight at it. It spun like a fireball and looked as if it would fall to the earth. The sun then broke free from its orbit and began to plunge to the earth, and the people screamed “God, have mercy on me.” Suddenly, the sun returned to orbit, and it turned into a beautiful day. Then, Mary appeared with St. Joseph, holding a brown scapular. “I am the Lady of the Rosary,” she proclaimed.

We now celebrate the life and work of these young children on May 13, the day of her first apparition. Young as they were, they carried out a great task of God, and now they are great among the blessed. May we be so courageous if God one day calls us to be.

VBS 2012

A Vacation with God

Summer is a time of vacation for most kids, but that doesn't mean they need a vacation from God. Instead, they can take a vacation with God at Vacation Bible School.

"It's not just a fun break for the summer; it's a wholesome place to go," says Barbara Cordaro, the director of the preschool Vacation Bible School program. "They have fellowship, they get to meet new people, they're learning. It's a very positive experience. Even when you're 3, you still get something out of it."

Vacation Bible School will be held June 11 through June 15 at St. Mary on the Hill Catholic School, beginning each day at 8:30 a.m. and ending at 12:30 p.m. This year's Vacation Bible School theme is "All Aboard the Vatican Express." The program will have two tracks: one for children in elementary school and another for those in preschool. Although the two groups of children will be separate for most of the time, they will begin each day together with opening songs.

After the morning meeting, the children will go through rotations of other activities, such as games, crafts, faith stations, snacks and more. For every day of Vacation Bible School, there will be a different Bible challenge, and the children will play games and watch the volunteers act out skits that integrate the daily Bible challenge.

This is a week full of having fun and learning about God, not just for the kids, but also for the teens and adults who volunteer to help out.

"You can put God in your everyday life," Barbara says. "I think it's a matter of giving reverence with fun. That's one thing I take a way from it

and try to instill in the kids, and also the volunteers. The adults even get a lot out of it. I have a lot of adults that have never volunteered, and they come back to me and say they had so much fun that week because it wasn't what they were expecting. We try to challenge everyone, and hopefully they will come away with a greater sense of their faith."

Vacation Bible School allows the children to be enthusiastic about learning Bible lessons. They also learn the importance of stewardship through spending time with other people in the parish and seeing how we can use our time and talents in the community.

"They play a leadership role in that they share their faith with the children and set an example for the children," says Vacation Bible School director Joan Purucker. "They see the adults going to Mass each day and on Wednesdays we do an Adoration, and they set a good example for the children as to how to live their faith."

Whether you are 3 years old or 73 years old, Vacation Bible School has something for you.

"It reinforces what we learn about our faith," Barbara says. "It gives us more knowledge, even at a very basic level. It's a very good learning experience, and it incorporates learning with having fun. You can actually embrace your faith with having fun. It doesn't all have to be seriousness. As the week progresses, it's amazing to see that the kids get it. You see that spark, and it feeds them."

For more information on Vacation Bible School or to volunteer, please call the parish office at 706-733-6627.



The children gathered together during last year's VBS program



Fr. John Tran teaching Vacation Bible School students last year



Students participate in a variety of different activities during Vacation Bible School

Rosary Group Provides Beautiful Outlet for Marian Devotion

As we honor the Blessed Virgin Mary during the month of May, a decades old parish ministry invites you to join them in offering the Rosary and other traditional devotions to our Blessed Mother.

The Rosary Group has been an active part of St. Mary's for 30 years, gathering every Monday at 4:30 p.m. to spend a half hour praying the Rosary and the Perpetual Novena in Honor of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

"We fit a lot into our 30 minutes," says co-chairman Patricia Boerner. "We pray the Rosary, special prayers to the Blessed Mother, an extra decade for the needs and petitions of all our parishes in the area, and any special intentions of the members and conclude with our Novena to the Blessed Mother. We just try to offer up as many intentions as we can, asking the Blessed Mother to oversee all of our prayers."

Over the years, membership in the group has remained consistent, with around 30 members and an average attendance of 12 to 15.

"We have a nucleus of members that have been with us faithfully over the years," Patricia says. "Some have moved away and some have passed away and we have some new folks here and there as well. We also get a variety of drop ins: people that cannot come regularly, but come when they can. The beautiful thing is, there is no commitment, no officers, no duties, no fees, no nothing. Just prayer!"

Patricia co-chairs the group with another longtime participant, Ellen Burroughs. The two of them, and other helpers including Katie Walker, provide all the copies of prayers and other resources for each meeting.

Every Monday afternoon contains an endearing moment of some kind, Patricia says, from a visitor bringing a plate of cookies or a chance encounter with the bishop and an episcopal blessing!

Over the years the group has received countless prayer requests from Catholics in the area and have had a number of prayers answered as well.



"I've heard all my life that when you pray by yourself it's wonderful, but it's when you pray in groups that it's particularly powerful and here's that group," Ellen says. "When two or more are gathered in my name there, too, am I. That's a very powerful statement of Our Lord's, and when we gather, Christ is with us."

During this Month of Mary, the Rosary Group wishes to extend a special invitation for you to come and pray with them.

"I think people would be pleasantly surprised," Ellen says. "Just come and join us; we have all the rosaries and pamphlets. Just bring yourself and spend a half hour with us!"

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– Ellen Burroughs

Answering the Important Questions *continued from front cover*

answered by all: Why is there something rather than nothing? Why does the human heart yearn for love, liberty, justice, peace? What is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of my life? What happens when we die?

I would hope that Catholic parents, who build their lives on certain answers to those questions, would wish to live in a way that made their faith obvious to their children. Even more so, what parents would not make the utmost effort to instruct their children in the most important truths? Is it possible that a mother would help her daughter learn the periodic table, but be lackadaisical about grace and the presence of the Risen Christ in the sacraments?

Parents owe their children their best answers to the deepest questions. Children are genuinely interested in the larger questions, as anyone who has spent an hour with a 4-year-old asking “why” about everything knows. For many parents though, being honest with their children provokes an awkward examination of conscience. The religious formation of children requires one to be honest about one’s own religious practice. It would be very difficult to say to one’s children, and to oneself, “Your mother and I are superficial people who do not bother to seek answers to the fundamental human questions.”

Or: “We are religious believers but too lazy to actually worship or pray with you.” Or: “We have gotten so

busy with secondary things that we neglected to teach you about primary things.” Or: “We care enough about you to worry about the health of your body, but not enough to worry about your soul.” So much easier to simply say: “We won’t impose anything on you, and let you choose for yourself.” That is not education, but abdication.

Parents owe their children the best of themselves. Their best is not only good schools and extracurricular programs. It is their basic values, including their answers to the ultimate questions. The Apostle Peter said, about the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ: “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you.” Parents should do no less.

God bless you,



Fr. Jerry

P.S. If tuition is the only stumbling block that is keeping you from giving your children the blessing of a Catholic education at Aquinas High School or in our parish grade school, please come and talk to me before making a decision.

Ad Placement



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